

## 102 Paper #1: Biographical Interpretation

Due: Wed. 2/7/18 (working draft due Mon. 2/5). A paper counts as meeting deadline if it is a) physically turned in on time or b) is emailed by the deadline. Emailed papers must still be printed by the student and handed in in a folder. [Grace period: **if you attend the full class session on the due date** you may turn in the paper 24 hours later without penalty. On a case-by-case basis I may grant additional extensions **only if you contact me before the due date**. Extensions may impact your grade.]

Length: medium (1,000 words *minimum*)

Format: Typed, double-spaced, **12-point font**. No cover page. Name, class & section #, 'paper #1', and **word count** in the upper-right or upper-left corner of the first page. Use page numbering. Use standard margins (1" on right, left, top & bottom).

Use of sources: use MLA documentation style

- \*use parenthetical citations to indicate borrowed words, facts, ideas

- \*provide a **works cited** listing including our textbook and the biography used

- \*direct quotations<sup>1</sup> must be properly formatted and are limited to 15% of total

Audience: the whole class, including your teacher

Other Requirements: Include in a folder (w. pockets)...

- \*typed, double-spaced paper (name, etc. in upper corner—no cover page)

- \*USB flash drive labeled w. your name (this is for voice recorded comments)

- \*writer's memo (informal note to your professor about your paper)

- \*xerox of all *outside* sources (not our textbook) in your works cited list

**Topic:** This assignment will focus on authors featured in the "Critical Casebooks" in Chapters 11, 12 and 32 of your text: Flannery O'Connor, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Emily Dickinson, and Langston Hughes. [IMPORTANT: Do not choose either Alice Walker or Robert Frost for this paper.] You may also choose to write about Sylvia Plath. The topic for your paper will be **a single work** by one of these six authors.

**Approach:** This will be a two-part paper, a 'Before' section and an 'After' section. In the first part, provide your readers with an in-depth interpretation of the chosen story or poem based solely on the text itself and not using any information about the author's life, times or other writings. **Remember that an interpretation is a hypothesis about the meaning of the work; it is not a mere summary or retelling of the story or poem.** Explain and justify your theory. No plot summary, please. Your readers (see 'audience') have access to all of the works in question.

In the second part, explain in detail how your original interpretation is affected<sup>2</sup> when you introduce a few key facts about the author's life, times, and/or works. **Do not summarize the author's life. Do not write a biographical sketch.** Instead make use of a few relevant details and show how your awareness of those facts influenced your interpretation of the work.

Suggestions:

- 1) Your paper is an argument, your thesis is a statement of opinion. Assume that your audience will read your argument skeptically (I will!). You'll have to work hard to be convincing.
- 2) It's a good idea to concentrate especially on difficult spots in the chosen poem or story. Set this project up as a kind of detective work—you've got a tricky interpretive problem to solve.
- 3) Use your IRPs to help you, especially with the 'Before' parts, since by the time you start writing your paper you will already be somewhat informed about each of these authors.

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<sup>1</sup> When quoting word-for-word, even for a part of a sentence, use either quotation marks or the indented block-quotation format (see your Reference Guide section 68e). Plagiarized papers will receive a failing grade.

<sup>2</sup> "Affected" might mean that your original theory is either confirmed or reversed or modified or extended. This will be covered in class.

## 102 Paper #2: Sociological Interpretation—Gender, Race, Class, Culture

Due: Wed. 2/28/18 [Grace period: **if you attend the full class session on the due date** you may turn in the paper 24 hours later without penalty. I may grant additional extensions **only if you contact me before the due date**. Additional extensions may impact your grade.]

Length: medium (1,000 words *minimum*)

Format: Typed, double-spaced, **12-point font**. No cover page. Name, class & section #, ‘paper #1’, and **word count** in the upper-right or upper-left corner of the first page. Use page numbering. Use standard margins (1” on right, left, top & bottom).

Use of sources: use MLA documentation style for the literary work + any secondary sources

\*use parenthetical citations to indicate borrowed words, facts, ideas

\*provide a **works cited** listing including our textbook and the biography used

\*direct quotations<sup>1</sup> must be properly formatted and are limited to 15% of total

Audience: the whole class, including your teacher

Other Requirements: Include in a folder (w. pockets)...

\*typed, double-spaced paper (name, etc. in upper corner—no cover page)

\*writer’s memo (remind me of **your improvement goals from paper #1**)

\*xerox of all *outside* sources (not our textbook) in your works cited list

optional: USB flash drive for voice comments

**Topic**: The topic of this paper is to be any poem, play or story found in our textbook. You may select one of the works discussed in class or another work found in our text. See me for advice as needed.

**Approach**: Your approach to analyzing and interpreting the chosen work of literature will be to speculate about *how the meaning of the work changes* depending on the gender, social class, ethnicity, religion, politics, etc. of the reader. For example, a typical white male reader of the mid-Twentieth century would probably see “The Catbird Seat” as just another light and amusing story by Thurber, whereas a feminist reader of today might very well see it as a somewhat hysterical reaction by an author who is unconsciously threatened by women in a position of power—especially women who dare to enter into a “man’s world.”

**Methods**: Your task is to present your readers with variant interpretations of the same text based on the point of view of different real or hypothetical readers. That is to say, you will offer **two or more** viewpoints on the poem or story depending on whether the reader is male or female, black or white (or some other racial/ethnic type), middle or lower class, devout or atheist, etc. Show your readers how the meaning we make from a work of art can vary greatly due to one’s background and cultural assumptions.

**Remember to assume that your reader will challenge, question, and resist every step of the way: explain, clarify, and provide detailed evidence in every paragraph.**

I suggest that you review Chapter 49 of your book: “Critical Approaches to Literature.” The sections on “Sociological Criticism,” “Gender Criticism,” and “Cultural Studies” are relevant to this assignment.

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